

2015 BEAR WISE WYOMING UPDATE

Introduction

The Bear Wise Wyoming Program is a proactive initiative that seeks to minimize human-bear (black and grizzly) conflicts, minimize management-related bear mortalities associated with preventable conflicts, and to safeguard human communities in northwest Wyoming. The overall objective of the Bear Wise Wyoming Program is to promote individual and community ownership of ever-increasing human-bear conflict issues, moving toward creating a social conscience regarding responsible attractant management and behavior in bear habitat. This project seeks to raise awareness and proactively influence local waste management infrastructures with the specific intent of preventing conflicts from recurring. Strategies used to meet the Bear Wise Wyoming Program's objectives are: 1) minimize accessibility of unnatural attractants to bears in developed areas; 2) employ a public outreach and education campaign to reduce knowledge gaps about bears and the causes of conflicts; and 3) employ a bear resistant waste management system and promote bear-resistant waste management infrastructure.

This report provides a summary of program accomplishments in 2015. Past accomplishments are reported in the IGBST's 2006 - 2014 annual reports and the Department's 2011-2014 Annual Job Completion Reports.

Background

In 2004, a subcommittee of the IGBST conducted an analysis of causes and spatial distribution of grizzly bear mortalities and conflicts in the GYE for the period of 1994–2003. The analysis identified that the majority of known, human-caused grizzly bear mortalities occurred due to agency management actions in response to conflicts (34%); self defense killings, primarily by big game hunters (20%); and vandal killings (11%). The report made 33 recommendations to reduce human-grizzly bear conflicts and mortalities with focus on three actions that could be positively influenced by agency resources and personnel: 1) reduce conflicts at developed sites; 2) reduce self-defense killings; and 3) reduce vandal killings (Servheen et al. 2004).

To address action 1, the subcommittee recommended that a demonstration area be established to focus proactive, innovative, and enhanced management strategies where developed site conflicts and agency management actions resulting in relocation or removal of grizzly bears had historically been high. Spatial examination of conflicts identified the Wapiti area in northwest Wyoming as having one of the highest concentrations of black bear and grizzly bear conflicts in the GYE. The North Fork of the Shoshone River west of Cody was then chosen as the first area composed primarily of private land to have a multi-agency/public approach to reducing conflicts at developed sites.

In 2005, the Department began implementation of the Bear Wise Community Program. Although the program's efforts were focused primarily in the Wapiti area, the Department initiated a smaller scale project in Teton County to address the increasing number of black and grizzly bear conflicts in the Jackson, Wyoming area. For the last nine years, the Bear Wise Community Programs in both Cody and Jackson have deployed a multi-faceted education and outreach

campaign in an effort to minimize human-bear conflicts and promote proper attractant management. Although a wide array of challenges remain and vary between communities, many accomplishments have been made and progress is expected to continue as Bear Wise efforts gain momentum. In an effort to broaden the scope of the program, this work was rebranded as the Bear Wise Wyoming Program to reference the work done on a broader scale across the state and beyond, however regional efforts are still referred to as Bear Wise Community Programs in this document.

Wapiti Project Update

The Wapiti Bear Wise Community Program continues to utilize radio, television and print media, mass mailings, and the use of signing on private and public land to convey the educational messages surrounding human-bear conflict prevention. Conflict prevention information is also disseminated through public workshops and presentations and by contact with local community groups, governments, the public school system, and various youth organizations. To compliment educational initiatives, the program uses an extensive outreach campaign that assists the community in obtaining and utilizing bear-resistant products and implementing other practical methods of attractant management. Ongoing efforts and new accomplishments for 2015 are as follows:

The Carcass Management Program continues to provide a domestic livestock carcass removal service for livestock producers located in occupied grizzly bear habitat within Park County, Wyoming. The program has been traditionally funded by the Park County Predator Management District and Wyoming Animal Damage Management Board. In addition to those donors, the program received contributions from Park County Commissioners, Wyoming Outdoorsmen, and the Memorial Bear Fund. The program provides livestock producers and owners with an alternative to the use of on-site carcass dumps, which are a significant bear attractant and indirectly contribute to numerous human-bear conflicts. Since June 2008, 755 domestic livestock carcasses have been removed from private lands. This year an article was published in the International Bear News discussing the efficacy of the program.

Recommendations concerning the proper storage of garbage and other attractants are provided to the Park County Planning and Zoning Commission for new developments within the greater Cody area. The Bear Wise Coordinator reviews proposed developments on a case-by-case basis, attends monthly meetings, and contacts applicants directly to discuss conflict prevention measures. To date, these comments have been adopted as either formal recommendations or as a condition of approval for 19 new developments within Park County.

This year, with grants from the Wyoming Outdoorsmen and Yellowstone Country Bear Hunters Association, the Department was able to purchase 100 cans of bear spray to be distributed to sportsmen. The bear spray was handed out at the Department's Cody hunter check station, and all cans were distributed in under an hour. Sportsmen were asked to voluntarily fill out a short survey to gather a better understanding of how the Bear Wise Wyoming program can better meet constituent needs.



*Bear Wise Wyoming Coordinator
Dusty Lasseter at the bear spray
giveaway in Cody, Wyoming*

The Department's partnership with the North Fork Bear Wise Group (NFBWG) continues to grow. The group is comprised of six local Wapiti citizens that meet monthly in order to articulate community needs and assist in the development of educational and outreach initiatives. The group met once a month for six months (during active bear season) and were instrumental in coming up with ideas on how to reduce human-bear conflicts.

In conjunction with the Department developing a new website for hunters and fishermen, LCS personnel were able to create a Bear Wise Wyoming page to better educate both resident and non-resident sportsmen and recreationists. In the future this platform will be a key place to direct citizens who have questions about staying safe in bear country. <https://wgfd.wyo.gov/Wildlife-in-Wyoming/More-Wildlife/Large-Carnivore/Grizzly-Bear-Management/Bear-Wise-Wyoming>



WYOMING GAME & FISH DEPARTMENT

APPLY OR BUY

HUNTING IN WYOMING

FISHING & BOATING

PUBLIC ACCESS

WILDLIFE IN WYOMING

NEWS

REGIONAL OFFICES

HABITAT

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WILDLIFE IN WYOMING

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MORE WILDLIFE

BIGHORN SHEEP

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LARGE CARNIVORE

NONGAME BIRDS AND MAMMALS

URBAN AND NUISANCE WILDLIFE

WILDLIFE HEALTH

WATCHABLE WILDLIFE

Bear Wise Wyoming



Hunting & Fishing in Bear Country

Hunters and Fishermen need to take extra precautions when recreating in bear country. Due to the nature of these activities we are predisposed to bear encounters or conflicts. As sportsmen it is our responsibility to behave appropriately in bear country This information can greatly reduce the chances of a human/bear conflict.

Why hunters and fishermen are at risk of bear encounters

- They quietly pursue game in the field or fish next to loud rivers and streams.
- Masking of human scent and moving into the wind.
- Being active during dusk and dawn.



The Bear Wise Wyoming page on the Department website.

Educational black bear/grizzly bear identification materials were distributed to individuals and local sporting goods stores in the Cody, Pinedale, and Lander areas, and mailed to black bear hunters who registered bait sites with the Department in areas surrounding the GYE. Other efforts in the Wapiti/Cody area included:

- Numerous informational presentations focused on human-bear conflict prevention to audiences including the Park, Fremont, Hot Springs, and Big Horn County public school systems, homeowners associations, Boy Scouts, 4-H members,, Paint Rock Hunter Management Program, guest ranches, and college students. Frequent one-on-one contacts were made during the 2015 conflict season in areas where the occurrence of human-bear conflicts has historically been high.
- A “Working Safely in Bear Country” workshop was conducted for the Park County Weed and Pest District, Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Black Hills Energy, and the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC).
- A booth containing information on bear identification, attractant storage, hunting and recreating safely in bear country, and the proper use of bear spray was staffed at the Lander Winter Fair, Cody Arbor Day, Dubois Museum Days, Lander Outdoor Expo, and Wyoming Outdoorsmen Banquet.

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- By utilizing the bear trailer, booths, workshops, and giving approximately 50 presentations, the Bear Wise Wyoming Program directly reached approximately 4,250 people in the Cody Region.
- The Department gave two interpretative hikes up the Elk Fork River on the Shoshone National Forest to discuss the ecology, management, and conservation of the Yellowstone grizzly bear for the annual Cody Chamber of Commerce sponsored “Spring Into Yellowstone”. These tours took approximately five hours and a good deal of bear sign was identified on the tour.
- A public service announcement (PSA) was recorded by Department personnel on “Staying Safe in Bear Country” and broadcast over the radio in the spring and fall of 2015 on the Bighorn Basin Radio Network.
- In the Cody Region, LCS personnel met with local producers and landowners to minimize conflicts. Personnel erected 19 temporary electric fences around bee apiaries, and several electric fences around apple orchards to deter bears.



- In the spring, LCS personnel put on 13 “Living in Large Carnivore Country” workshops across Wyoming. The objective of these workshops is to reach out to the public and give them the opportunity to learn how to live with bears, mountain lions, and wolves. In 2015 we gave presentations and hands on demonstrations to ~ 250 attendees.

Pinedale Area Update

In 2011, a Bear Wise Community Program was initiated targeting residential areas north of Pinedale, Wyoming where the occurrence of human-bear conflict has increased in recent years. A portion of the highlighted accomplishments for the Pinedale area in 2015 includes:

- As bears have expanded, increased efforts have occurred to educate the public about bear ecology, management, and safety. Bear safety presentations were given to the Boy Scouts of America at “Camp New Fork”, and to cowboys and shearers of multiple grazing associations in the Region. The following entities also received bear safety presentations: Sublette County Chamber of Commerce and Sublette County Visitor’s Center, USFS Pinedale and Big Piney Ranger Districts, Pinedale BLM, Sublette County Weed and Pest workers and volunteers, Red Cliff Bible Camp.
- Specific “Hunting in Bear Country” presentations were given to hunter safety classes throughout the Region.
- The Department secured donated materials to construct bear resistant meat storage poles. The Big Piney Ranger District erected four sets of meat poles in 2015 with the donated materials. This continues to be an area of interest to increase this infrastructure.
- The Department hosted a bear safety booth at Pinedale’s Rendezvous Days Celebration over a three day period in July of 2015. Pinedale’s Rendezvous Days attracts approximately 10,000 people over the four day event and Department employees contact an estimated 1,000 constituents.
- The Department hosted a bear safety booth at the Cora Rural Fire Department’s annual picnic and celebration, contacting dozens of homeowners that live and recreate in occupied grizzly bear habitat.
- We participated in a Department “Day in the Park” meeting and educating locals and tourists on bear education in the Pinedale Town Park.

Objectives for 2016 include continued expansion of the program into the other areas of the state where human-bear conflicts continue to be a chronic issue and the continuation of current educational and outreach efforts in the Cody area with specific focus on areas that have not adopted proper attractant management methods. The Department is also working to assist the USFS with providing bear proof storage containers and meatpoles at targeted areas in the Pinedale Region.

The Wapiti and Pinedale area Bear Wise Programs face the ongoing challenges of: 1) the absence of ordinances, regulations, or laws prohibiting the feeding of bears; 2) limited

educational opportunities and contact with portions of the community due to a large number of summer-only residents and the lack of organized community groups and; 3) decreased public tolerance for grizzly bears due to record numbers of human-bear conflicts and continued federal legal protection. The future success of the Bear Wise Wyoming Program lies in continued community interest and individual participation in proper attractant management.

Jackson Hole Area Update

The Bear Wise Jackson Hole Program continues educational and outreach initiatives to minimize human-bear conflicts within the community of Jackson and surrounding areas. In 2015, the program's public outreach and educational efforts included the use of signage, public workshops and presentations, distribution of informational pamphlets, promoting awareness about bear spray, carcass and fruit tree management, and utilizing our bear education trailer.

A bear education trailer was purchased in August 2010 with funding from the Department, Grand Teton National Park, Bridger-Teton National Forest, and Jackson Hole Wildlife Foundation. Two bear mounts (1 grizzly bear and 1 black bear) have been placed in the trailer along with other educational materials. The bear mounts were donated to the Department through a partnership with the United States Taxidermist Association and the Center for Wildlife Information. The trailer was displayed and staffed at various events and locations including Grand Teton National Park, Jackson Elk Fest, Fourth of July Parade, and the National Elk Refuge Visitor Center. The following comprises some of the highlights from 2015:

- Public service announcements were broadcast on four local radio stations in Jackson for a total of six weeks throughout the spring, summer and fall of 2015. The announcements focused on storing attractants so they are unavailable to bears and hunting safely in bear country.
- Numerous educational talks were presented to various groups including homeowner's associations, guest ranches, youth camps, Jackson residents, tourists, school groups, and Teton County employees.
- Door flyers with detailed information about attractant storage and bear conflict avoidance were distributed in two Teton County residential areas where high levels of bear/human conflicts were occurring.
- A considerable amount of time was spent removing ungulate and livestock carcasses from residential areas and ranches in the Jackson Region. Recommendations were made to a north Jackson home owner's association about fruit tree management and installing bear resistant infrastructure in their subdivision.
- Spanish language bear informational pamphlets were distributed to Spanish speaking residents in Teton County with the help of the Teton County Latino Resource Center, Teton Literacy Center, and the Jackson Visitor Center.

- Refrigerator magnets featuring tips about proper attractant management were distributed to Teton Village homeowners, Aspens Property Management, and Jackson Hole Mountain Resort lodging.
- Numerous personal contacts were made with private residents in Teton County. This has proven to be a useful way to establish working relationships with residents and maintain an exchange of information about bear activity in the area. A booth containing information on bear identification, attractant storage, hunting and recreating safely in bear country, and the proper use of bear spray was staffed at the Jackson Hole Antler Auction and Kids Fishing Day.

Mike Boyce installs electric fence to resolve bear conflicts at the Teton County Transfer Station.



- Assisted multiple hunting outfitters and with the installation and maintenance of electric fence systems around their field camps and located in the Bridger-Teton National Forest.
- Assisted Teton County Transfer Station staff with the installation and maintenance of an electric fence enclosure around their dead animal pit.
- Signage detailing information on hunting safely in bear country, bear identification, recent bear activity, and proper attractant storage were placed at USFS trailheads and in private residential areas throughout Teton County.
- Consultations were conducted at multiple businesses and residences where recommendations were made regarding sanitation infrastructure and compliance with the Bear Conflict Mitigation and Prevention Land Development Regulations (LDR).
- Bear Aware educational materials were distributed to campground hosts in the Caribou-Targhee National Forest, hunters, and numerous residents in Teton County.
- Several radio and newspaper interviews were conducted regarding conflict prevention in the Jackson area.
- Educational black bear/grizzly bear identification materials were distributed to black bear hunters who registered bait sites with the Department in the Jackson Region.
- Worked with Jackson sanitation companies on researching and purchasing new bear resistant trash cans.
- Worked with the Jackson Hole Wildlife Foundation on designing and installing an educational billboard located near Wilson on Wyoming Highway 22.

Objectives for the Bear Wise Jackson Hole Program in 2016 will be focused on supporting Teton County and local waste management companies with projects that will help disseminate information and achieve compliance with the recently adopted Teton County Bear Conflict Mitigation and Prevention LDR. In addition, more work will be done to identify areas within the city limits of Jackson and Star Valley communities where better attractant management and sanitation infrastructure is needed.

The recent implementation of the Teton County Bear Conflict Mitigation and Prevention LDR has greatly reduced the amount of available attractants on the landscape and is a tremendous step forward for the Bear Wise Jackson Hole Program. The new challenges faced by the Department will be achieving full compliance with this regulation, even in years with low conflict when it may appear that the conflict issues are resolved. The Bear Wise Jackson Hole Program will convey the importance of compliance and strive to maintain public support for the LDR through public outreach and education projects. In order for the Bear Wise Jackson Hole Program to be successful, the program must continually identify information and education needs within the community while being adaptive to changing situations across different geographic areas. This will require the Department to coordinate with other government agencies and local non-government organizations working across multiple jurisdictions to develop a uniform and consistent message. If this level of coordination is achieved, the Department will be more effective in gaining support and building enthusiasm for the Bear Wise Jackson Hole Program, directing resources to priority areas, and reaching all demographics.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AND EDUCATION EFFORTS

In addition to the standard duties by the LCS through the Bear Wise Wyoming Program, multiple avenues of outreach and education occur throughout Wyoming and across the world-wide-web.

In working with Departmental personnel in Cheyenne, there has been a great deal of effort to update and incorporate messages regarding grizzly bear ecology, management and safety into the Department website. The grizzly bear management web page continues to be maintained and updated on a regular basis to provide timely information to the public regarding grizzly bear management activities conducted by the Department. Web page content includes various interagency annual reports and updates and links to other grizzly bear recovery web sites. Beginning May 2015, weekly updates of ongoing management activities related to depredations, research, trapping and monitoring, and information and education were posted to the Department's website. A total of 24 weekly updates were posted from May 2, 2015 through October 24, 2015. A monthly update of the activities of the LCS is posted on the webpage, as well as various reports and publications pertinent to grizzly bear ecology and management in Wyoming. In addition, personnel issued multiple educational news releases throughout the year informing readers and listeners of bear safety, behavior, conflict avoidance, food storage and natural food availability. For information specific to the Department's grizzly bear management program; including links to publications, reports, updates, and plan visit: <https://wgfd.wyo.gov/web2011/wildlife-1000674.aspx>

Hunter Education is a vital component toward the mission of the Department. Every hunter education class in Wyoming is required to discuss how to hunt safely in bear country. To assist instructors, the Department has provided inert bear spray canisters for demonstration purposes and DVD's entitled "Staying Safe in Bear Country, A Behavioral Based Approach to Reducing Risk". A section on bear safety is included in the student manual. Approximately 5,000 students are certified each year.

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